Climate Change Is a Religion. Clean Air Is Science.

A personal essay on the difference between what we can control and what we believe we can control.

By Richard Preschel © 2026

Abstract: This essay argues that the belief in human control over planetary climate is not science but a belief system — structurally analogous to the rain dances documented across human cultures, including the synchronized mosque prayers recently ordered across Iran in response to six years of uninterrupted drought. It distinguishes this belief from the genuine and demonstrable science of local air quality management, which has produced measurable results over decades. Drawing on the work of Claude Allègre (1937–2025) and Ian Plimer — two credentialed geologists who wrote from within the scientific establishment — it examines the epistemological weakness of the 97% consensus claim, the causal inversion argument (CO_2 as consequence rather than cause of warming), the historical evidence of pre-industrial warm periods, and the institutional sociology that suppresses heterodox research. The author writes as someone who had asthma as a child, who grew up in Venezuela surrounded by geologists in an oil-producing country, who lived in France during Allègre's public controversies, and who holds a long personal commitment to the protection of nature — positions that together produce a perspective with no ideological home in the current debate.

I. Two Things That Should Not Be Confused

I had asthma as a child. This made me sensitive to air quality before I had any framework for thinking about it scientifically. When Los Angeles reduced its particulate emissions, children's lungs improved measurably. When London eliminated its coal fires, the killer fogs stopped. When the Rhine was cleaned, the fish returned. These are achievements of real environmental science: short causal chains, measurable interventions, observable results within human timescales.

I am deeply attached to the protection of nature. What I most love about Germany, where I now live in Berlin, is the German passion for nature that descends from Romanticism — the Wald, the reverence, the instinct that Caspar David Friedrich painted with such precision: the tiny human figure facing an immense landscape, with their back to us. The correct relationship, stated without words.

I say this because what follows will be mistaken, by people who do not

read carefully, for an argument in favor of pollution. It is the opposite. It is an argument for precision — for knowing what we can actually do, rather than performing what we wish we could do.

The belief that human industrial activity is the primary driver of planetary climate, and that modifying that activity through international treaties can stabilize the Earth's temperature, is not science. It is a belief. Beliefs are not science. And the confusion between the two has done considerable damage — to scientific credibility, to environmental policy, and to the genuine problems that practical ecology could otherwise address.

II. Growing Up Among Geologists

I grew up in Venezuela, an oil-producing country where geology is a serious profession with real economic stakes. Geologists read the Earth for a living. They do not theorize about it from behind computer screens — they walk it, drill it, date it, and interpret what they find in the rock.

From this background I absorbed certain things so early they feel like common sense, though apparently they are not:

Climate always changes. Change is not an anomaly of climate — it is its defining characteristic. The geologist sees this directly in the formations they study. The paleoclimatic record is a history of swings that make our current anxieties look parochial: Snowball Earth events that glaciated the tropics, hothouse periods when crocodiles lived in the Arctic, the Permian extinction that killed 96% of marine species through rapid warming and ocean acidification. All the existing species on this planet represent approximately 1% of the species that have ever lived, many of them eliminated by climate changes far more brutal than anything currently projected.

Since approximately 16,000 years ago, we have been living through an exceptional period of benign and stable climate, with an average global

temperature of around 16 degrees Celsius. This stability is geologically unusual. It is also the condition in which human civilization was built. The instinct to preserve it is understandable. The belief that we can guarantee it through carbon markets and conference declarations is something else entirely.

III. What Allègre and Plimer Actually Argue

Claude Allègre was France's most eminent geochemist, a Crafoord Prize winner, and a former Minister of Education, who died in 2025. He was not a petroleum industry lobbyist. He was a scientist who spent his career studying the Earth's chemistry, including its oceans, and who became increasingly alarmed by what he saw as the capture of climate science by institutional and political interests. His book *L'Imposture climatique* (Plon, 2010) cost him enormously in social and professional terms — the campaign against him in France was fierce, including petitions demanding he retract his views. I watched this from France, where I lived at the time, and I was largely in agreement with him, as was my daughter. He was not popular. Popularity is not a scientific criterion.

Ian Plimer is a geologist and emeritus professor at the University of Adelaide who has written extensively on climate from the same empirical standpoint — the long record of geological time as the necessary context for any honest evaluation of present-day climate trends.

Neither man denies that CO_2 is rising. Neither denies that a greenhouse effect exists. What both argue — and what their geological training specifically equips them to argue — is the following:

The causal direction is likely inverted. The standard IPCC narrative presents rising atmospheric CO_2 as the primary driver of temperature increase. But the Vostok ice core data — among the most reliable

paleoclimatic records available — consistently shows that temperature rises *precede* CO_2 rises by approximately 600 to 1,000 years, not the other way around. The mechanism is what anyone who has left a warm beer open knows: as oceans warm, they release dissolved CO_2 into the atmosphere. This is Henry's Law. It is not controversial physics. It is the beer effect.

Allègre's deepest concern — the one he expressed most consistently on French television, where I encountered him during his lifetime, rather than in the more polemical passages of his book — was ocean acidification. Not as a consequence of human CO_2 emissions, but as a consequence of warming oceans releasing CO_2 in a feedback loop that no international treaty can interrupt. This is a genuinely alarming position, and it comes from his actual expertise in geochemistry. It is also more alarming in one sense than the standard model: if the feedback runs in this direction, reducing industrial emissions does not stop it.

The 97% consensus is bad epistemology. Plimer's deconstruction of this figure deserves to be quoted in full, because it is largely correct. The figure derives from a survey sent to 10,257 people, whittled through a series of methodological choices to 77 self-identified climate scientists, of whom 75 agreed with the proposition in question. This is a tribe of 75 people, not a scientific consensus. A separate paper claiming 97.1% consensus based on "inspection" of 11,944 published papers was produced by volunteer activists from the Skeptical Science website, who did not read the complete papers and were not trained to evaluate the science within them.

More fundamentally: the number of scientists agreeing with a proposition has zero bearing on its truth. Einstein said it most economically when a collection of authors published *Hundert Autoren gegen Einstein* — A Hundred Authors Against Einstein — in 1931. His response: *"If I were wrong, one would have been enough."* Science is not a democracy. It is not settled by a show of hands. Scepticism, as Plimer correctly notes, underpins all science. A hypothesis where 97% of researchers agree is, in his fifty years of scientific experience, an

anomaly that demands scrutiny rather than deference.

IV. The Warm Periods That Inconveniently Existed

When the Paris Agreement was signed in 2015, I remarked to my psychiatrist: "Hallelujah, we have fixed the planet's thermostat." We laughed. The laughter was not cynicism — it was the recognition of a category error of staggering proportions. A psychiatrist is professionally trained to identify magical thinking: the belief that a symbolic act controls an external reality indifferent to symbols. The planet does not read treaties.

The inconvenient empirical fact underlying this laughter is that the Earth warmed significantly — repeatedly — before industrial activity existed to be blamed for it.

The Roman Warm Period, roughly contemporaneous with the height of the Roman Empire and the time of Jesus, is documented in the geological and historical record across multiple continents. In my research on the socioeconomic conditions of 1st century Judea — published separately as a Malthusian analysis of the Second Temple period — I found that climate warming and advancing desertification in the Land of Israel were necessary explanatory variables for the scale of the Jewish diaspora, the unaffordability of the Temple cult for the rural poor, and the social conditions that produced figures like John the Baptist and Jesus. The Mishna Bava Kama, compiled in the early 3rd century, prohibits the raising of small cattle in the Land of Israel — a piece of rabbinic legislation that only makes sense against a background of severe overgrazing and ecological degradation. The rabbis were not making a climate argument. They were legislating for an ecological reality. That is precisely what makes them reliable witnesses.

The Medieval Warm Period, roughly contemporaneous with the First Crusades, is equally well documented. Vineyards flourished in England.

Norse settlers farmed in Greenland. Alpine passes were open that are now permanently glaciated.

The famous hockey stick graph — the central visual argument of IPCC climate communication for years — was constructed in a way that effectively erased the Medieval Warm Period, flattening pre-industrial temperatures into an undifferentiated baseline before the dramatic modern uptick. The Climategate emails, leaked from the University of East Anglia's Climatic Research Unit in 2009, revealed researchers discussing precisely this problem — how to manage the Medieval Warm Period's inconvenient visibility in the data. Allègre treats these emails as confirmation of what he had long suspected about the institutional sociology of climate research. Post-scandal inquiries cleared the researchers of formal misconduct while acknowledging failures of transparency. The Medieval Warm Period remains in the geological record regardless.

V. The Rain Dance, Ancient and Modern

The belief that human ritual can influence weather is, as I noted in my research on ancient religious practice, an almost universal anthropological fact. The Talmudic tractate Ta'anit is largely organized around the communal fast as a response to drought, alongside other public calamities requiring collective prayer and fasting. Native American rain dances are documented across the continent. Egyptian priests performed elaborate ceremonies to ensure the Nile's flood. These are not primitive failures of reason — they are coherent responses to an uncontrollable reality by communities that lacked other tools.

What is less forgivable is performing the same ritual while claiming it is science.

Iran has experienced six consecutive years of catastrophic drought. Water levels have fallen so dramatically that hydroelectric dams are

operating at approximately 8% of capacity. Electricity cuts and water cuts have become endemic. There is serious governmental discussion of relocating Tehran — a capital city of nearly ten million people. Before this crisis became impossible to conceal, the Iranian regime spent five years attributing the drought to Israeli Air Force operations destroying clouds. When this narrative exhausted itself, the regime ordered three weeks of simultaneous prayers in mosques across the entire country to bring rain.

The rain did not come.

This is not an argument against prayer. It is an argument against confusing prayer with hydrology. And it is worth asking — honestly — how structurally different the mosque prayer campaign is from the Paris Agreement. Both are collective rituals performed in response to a climate reality that the participants cannot actually control. Both attribute to human action a causative role in planetary systems that operate on scales and timescales indifferent to human institutions. The Iranian mullarchy is more honest in one respect: it does not claim to be science.

VI. What We Actually Can Control

Saudi Arabia discovered massive fossil aquifers — water accumulated over tens of thousands of years during wetter geological periods — and decided to become the world's leading wheat exporter. In the desert. The center-pivot irrigation circles were visible from space. The export figures were real. By 2008, the aquifers were so depleted that Saudi Arabia announced the phase-out of domestic wheat production. By 2016 it was complete. Twenty thousand years of accumulated water, consumed in approximately thirty years. The Saudis are now purchasing agricultural land in Africa and Arizona to grow food for import.

Israel, with no fossil aquifers and 60% desert, became a net agricultural

exporter through engineering rather than extraction: drip irrigation, large-scale desalination, wastewater recycling at rates that make European countries look careless, drought-resistant crop development. Constraint produced innovation. Scarcity enforced honesty about what the system could actually sustain.

The contrast is between two relationships with reality. One treats a non-renewable resource as income and spends it. The other treats scarcity as a permanent condition requiring permanent solutions. The Iranian opposition looks to Israel for expertise in precisely these domains — water management, aquifer conservation, agricultural adaptation — across an otherwise impassable political boundary, because drought makes ideological luxury unaffordable.

Syria's civil war, which European media narrated almost exclusively as a political and sectarian conflict, began on an ecological foundation that has been largely invisible in Western coverage. Between 2006 and 2010, Syria experienced its worst drought in recorded history. The northeastern provinces — historically the country's agricultural heartland — saw catastrophic crop failures compounded by decades of aquifer depletion through subsidized cotton and wheat production. Approximately 1.5 million people migrated from the rural east into the urban peripheries within a few years. Deraa, where the uprising began in March 2011, was among the cities that absorbed the largest influx of desperate, rootless rural migrants.

The desertification of eastern Syria, however, did not begin in 2006. My research suggests it began approximately three thousand years ago — a process so slow as to be invisible within any single human lifetime, but legible in the geological and archaeological record. The minority communities of Syria — Druze, Christians, Alawites, Kurds — occupy the western mountains and coastal ranges not for cultural reasons but for ecological ones: these are the areas that retained water and defensive terrain as the eastern plains gradually desiccated. The Sunni Arab majority, being the strongest, took the best agricultural land at the moment of settlement. Three millennia of desertification turned that

advantage into a catastrophic vulnerability.

This is what genuine environmental science looks like: slow, cumulative, geological, indifferent to political boundaries and ideological preferences. It does not offer the satisfaction of a villain or the comfort of a treaty. It requires the three words that honest inquiry begins with: *we don't know* — followed by patient empirical work on the actual systems involved.

VII. The Sociology of Consensus

Both Allègre and Plimer make arguments that go beyond the specific scientific claims — arguments about the institutional conditions under which climate science has been produced. These arguments are more defensible than their critics acknowledge.

The incentive structures of large-scale publicly funded science reward alarmism. A grant application premised on "the situation is complex and uncertain" competes poorly against one premised on "catastrophe is imminent and we have the model to prove it." Peer review conducted by researchers with career investments in the orthodox framework is not dispassionate evaluation. The systematic exclusion of heterodox research — documented in the Climategate correspondence, acknowledged even by the inquiries that cleared the principal researchers — is a real phenomenon with real effects on what gets published and what does not.

This is not a conspiracy. It is sociology. It is what happens in any field where reputation mediates access to resources: the selection pressure is for social performance rather than content quality. The pattern is visible across the history of science. Fritz Zwicky observed in 1933 that something was missing from gravitational accounting in galaxy clusters. He was ignored for forty years, partly because his ideas were threatening to established frameworks and partly because he had the social skills of

a badger. He died in 1974. He is now honored generously — posthumously, selectively, safely.

Allègre's colleague Vincent Courtillot, whose solar-cycle research was systematically blocked from publication by the IPCC-adjacent peer review network, represents the same pattern in a living career. Mordehai Milgrom, whose Modified Newtonian Dynamics explains galaxy rotation curves without dark matter from first principles, has spent forty years at the margins of a field that prefers invisible undetectable matter to a modification of its foundational equations. The James Webb Space Telescope is now producing observations that Milgrom's framework predicted and the Standard Model did not. The institutional response has been parameter adjustment rather than framework examination.

The 97% consensus, in this light, is not evidence that the question is settled. It is evidence that the sociology is working as designed.

VIII. What I Am Not Saying

I am not saying that CO_2 has no effect on temperature. The greenhouse effect exists and is not seriously disputed.

I am not saying that human industrial activity has had no effect on the environment. It demonstrably has — on air quality, river chemistry, soil composition, biodiversity, and a range of other measurable variables.

I am not saying that we should not reduce pollution. We should, vigorously, for reasons that have nothing to do with planetary thermostat claims: because children with asthma breathe better in cleaner air, because rivers support more life when they are not used as industrial drains, because forests are worth protecting because they are forests.

What I am saying is this: the claim that human activity is the *primary driver* of planetary climate, and that modifying that activity through international coordination can *stabilize global temperature*, goes far

beyond what the evidence supports and far beyond what the Earth's systems, in their complexity and their scale, have ever shown any inclination to defer to.

The Earth has been warming and cooling for 4.5 billion years. It warmed during the time of Jesus without our assistance. It warmed during the Crusades without our permission. It will continue doing what it has always done, driven by the forces that have always driven it — solar variability, volcanic and geothermal activity, ocean circulation, Milankovitch cycles, the biology of the deep crustal bacteria that Plimer reminds us extend four kilometers below our feet — with or without our conferences and our carbon credits and our synchronized prayers.

The belief that we can influence the climate is hubris — ὕβρις — in the classical sense: the overreach that invites the response of reality. The distinction between that belief and the practical science of local environmental management — the kind that cleans air and conserves aquifers and plants forests — is not a minor technical point. It is the difference between medicine and magic.

Caspar David Friedrich understood this. The tiny figure, back to us, facing the immense landscape.

That is the correct relationship. Not management. Reverence — and within that reverence, the patient, honest, local work of people who know what they can actually do.

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